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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language and English-language dailies gave significant reporting and editorial coverage December 15-18 to the exposure of the contents of a conversation between AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt and KMT vice presidential candidate Vincent Siew on December 8. The pro-unification "United Daily News" front-paged a banner headline on December 15 that said "Burghardt and Siew Express Worries in a Secret Meeting That Bian [Will] Use Dirty Tricks to Disrupt the Elections."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an analysis in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" discussed the exposed memorandum of conversation between Burghardt and Siew and slammed the KMT for conspiring with the United States to sell out Taiwan. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" criticized the lack of parity in Washington's dealings with the KMT. Both an editorial and a commentary in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" said the exposed secret document will do harm to the KMT camp. A separate "Apple Daily" op-ed said Washington is more worried about martial law in Taiwan than the UN referendum. An editorial in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" discussed the United States' mistrust of President Chen Shui-bian, while a "United Daily News" editorial said the UN referendum will give Chen a leverage to put Taiwan's new presidential and its political situation on a short leash. An editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said Burghardt's trip "marked a watershed in Washington's dealing with Chen and the ruling DPP." End summary.

A) "Betraying Taiwan's Voters and Opening its [KMT] Heart with the United States?"

Deputy Editor-in-Chief Tsou Jiing-wen noted in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] (12/116):

"The Ma Ying-jeou [KMT presidential candidate] camp has clarified [KMT vice presidential candidate Vincent] Siew's way of speaking regarding the 'two-step' voting format, which is a typical style of 'Teflon pot,' meaning 'nothing to do with me.' The candidate and his running mate are a unit. If Ma wants to set aside Siew's remarks in the memocon, he has to reprimand Vincent Siew [and ask Siew] to deny that [Siew] had a tacit understanding with the United States on his own account. But the circumstances are the opposite of this. Siew confirmed that he has taken unverified rumors, the imaginary so-called 'dirty tricks,' to act like a spoiled brat and complain to the United States. Do these talks and behavior mean that this [potential KMT government] will be a puppet regime? Does Taiwan need such an authority that listens to orders and handles matters for others [such as the United States]? ...

"The referendum of returning to the UN proposed by the KMT has been sent to the Central Election Committee. Up until now, neither the party's central committee nor its candidates has explained to the general public why the referendum was proposed, and they arguments to encourage people to vote and show their support. Instead, [the

KMT] puts more emphasis on its insistence on the 'two-step' voting system than on explaining the content of its referendum [to return to the UN]. This is really a very weird phenomenon. Now, in order to block the UN referendum, the truth was revealed. This explains that the referenda on opposing corruption and returning to the UN are 'all fake' and are typical ways of cheating votes. Does it mean that whether the referenda pass or not, the proposing party does not care at all? ...

"Ma and Siew do not explain to several millions of voters who have worked hard to sign the signatures [to propose the referendum to join the UN]. Instead, they report to a foreign country's messenger. Do they [Ma and Siew] put the people in their mind? They also put the United States, who has intervenes in Taiwan's internal affairs, and China, who instructs behind the U.S., as their colonial masters. What if Ma and Siew were elected [as president and vice president], would it manifest the rumor that they will make Taiwan the sub-colony co-managed by China and the United States? [In such a case] [w]ill their roles be inferior to that of the chief executive? [Ed Note: title of the chief official of Chinese-ruled Hong Kong] Taiwan had its first president directly elected by people in 1996. Does it mean [Taiwan] will go backward to the election of chief executive with which the style is even inferior to that of an election by agent? ..."

B) "Why Is the US Silent on the KMT?"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (12/15):

"The US cannot be blamed for preferring one presidential ticket over another -- or one party dominating the legislature and not the other. But here is a question that US officials can ask themselves: Is the long-term damage that can be inflicted on Taiwan's national -- and regional -- stability and core democratic structures and

practices from one-sided intervention worth the short-term political gain? When Burghardt criticized Chen -- however undiplomatic his wording -- even Chen supporters could see beyond the reproachful tone. They could appreciate that Burghardt probably meant well, even if certain superiors at the State Department and the White House decidedly do not.

"What these allies might not appreciate is the lack of parity in Washington's dealings with the KMT. Chen, for all his faults, has been scapegoated for most of his time as president over the obstructiveness of not only Beijing apparatchiks but also pro-China elements in the pan-blue camp. And because most US officials are serenely ignorant of Taiwanese domestic politics and do not read Chinese, they do not understand that the balance of KMT efforts in the legislature has been to grind the Chen administration to a halt -- even while directly insulting the US -- and to hell with ordinary people caught up in the circus. ...

"The US has been steadfast in its silence over the KMT's agenda of discrediting administrative systems. It therefore must be asked if anyone among serving US officials other than AIT Director Stephen Young has requisite understanding of these problems. It would have been gratifying if Burghardt had publicly warned Ma and Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng of the corrosive impact of denigrating public institutions for partisan gain. Perhaps Burghardt could have publicly discussed the instability that might follow a legislative run on the authority of executive agencies -- including holding entire budgets to ransom over the most trivial acts and shutting down entire systems of government. Or shutting down meaningful arms spending. But no. None of this is publicly accountable. We can only pray that this is not the kind of governance and leadership that Washington would wish for Taiwan -- or tolerate in the name of expediency."

C) "Exposure of the Secret Document Harms Ma Ying-jeou"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] editorialized (12/17):

"The exposure of the secret document [i.e. the memorandum of conversation] between [AIT Chairman] Raymond Burghardt and [KMT vice presidential candidate] Vincent Siew indicated that not only the DPP

but also the KMT knows nothing about how to keep secret. Even if the exposure were done by hackers, apparently neither of the two parties had been capable of fighting hackers. What else can we expect from them? ...

"In addition, Burghardt raised doubts to Siew with regard to Ma Ying-jeou's attitude toward the [U.S.] arms sales. Burghardt also reminded Ma that, given Taiwan's insufficient military strength, talks between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait will be akin to talks of surrender. This is exactly the gray area where Ma has been equivocating and keeping vague, thus providing people the opportunity to suspect whether Ma is pro-China. Ma must no longer dodge the question and must make an honest and clear response to it."

D) "Caught with One's Pants down"

Columnist Antonio Chiang wrote in his column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] (12/18):

"... In fact, the United States' understanding of Taiwan's situation may not necessarily be less comprehensive than that of local specialists. The Americans' infiltration of Taiwan society is very thorough, and rarely is there any secret in Taiwan that they don't know. AIT does a very solid study and investigation of Taiwan, and it keeps a thorough and detailed record of the words and deeds of every politician. Normally it will come to no avail when either the ruling or opposition members try to strive for recognition or lay the blame on others in front of the Americans. ...

"The [U.S.] arms sales is a major stumbling block for the KMT to seek the U.S. trust and improve Taipei-Washington ties. Without sufficient defense capabilities on Taiwan's side, the cross-Strait talks will become talks of surrender. Ma's close aides and the KMT strategists are still not vigilant or perceptive about this. It would be more significant if the exposure of the secret document [between Burghardt and Siew] could get the KMT's attention. ..."

E) "Burghardt Is Worried that Taiwan Will be in Chaos"

Edward I-hsin Chen, a professor at the Institute of American Studies at Tamkang University, wrote an article in the op-ed of the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] (12/15)

"... The warning that the United States gives to Taiwan regarding martial law is definitely not making unfounded accusations. [AIT Chairman] Raymond Burghardt and [U.S. Deputy Secretary of State]

Thomas Christensen obviously have noticed that, although Taiwan is not formally under martial law, the manifestation of it has come into existence in many aspects. For example, with a search warrant in hand, the National Security Bureau, prosecutors and police dramatically raided the Shih-ying publisher and searched publications; Minister of National Defense Lee Tien-yu said that if the Legislative Yuan did not ratify martial law imposed by the president, the military force would still do whatever the president said and would send the 6th Army Corps to take over the Taipei City; the Ministry of Education unlawfully and forcibly tore down the plaque "Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall," which manner was seriously against the procedural justice. All these examples have made the U.S. officials in Taiwan feel the withering atmosphere similar to that of imposing martial law.

"The United States has been highly suspicious at the latest developments in Taiwan. Not only these politicians and governmental offices' behavior lacks integrity, but also their unscrupulous attitudes reveal from their behavior and the ignorance and neglect regarding the value of democracy. Their performance has been no different from that of a dictatorial country. Obviously from the perspective of Washington D.C., Taiwan imposing martial law will be a worse circumstance than that of the UN referendum."

F) "How Come That Dirty Campaigning Tricks Are Still Lingerin?"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (12/18):

"... It is a well-known fact that the DPP is very skilled at

maneuvering and manipulating campaigns, and the one who is outstanding talented in doing so is Bian. Washington's strong doubts about Chen Shui-bian do not start from today; neither were they exposed after the 'secret meeting between Burghardt and Siew.' Similar messages have been constantly passed on to Taiwan from the American people via direct or indirect channels since six month ago until Burghardt came to Taiwan personally and called on various ruling and opposition leaders one month prior to the legislative elections. What on earth was he here for? Burghardt is not someone who is 'unaware of Taiwan affairs;' as a major character during the 1996 cross-Strait tension, the messages Burghardt brought with him and the issues he expressed concerns about have all represented certain significance.

"During his departure press briefing, Burghardt said reservedly but directly that during his meeting with Chen, Chen had repeatedly reiterated his pledges. One of the pledges that the United States attaches great importance to is that Chen guaranteed that the leadership can be transferred peacefully! ...

"Given a government which is composed mainly of people studying in law but which can violate and toy with laws so easily, is there any thing else that can restrain or check and balance it? Is there anything that a government which no one or nothing can restrain or check cannot do? Does Chen have any dirty campaigning tricks after all? Chen is the one who knows the answer best. The Taiwan people had better open their eyes and watch clearly how many dirty tricks he has!"

G) "Give the Pro-Green Voters a Reason to Oppose the UN Referendum"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (12/15):

"... Burghardt went right to the heart of the matter by pointing out frankly that the 'UN referendum' is 'one that Chen Shui-bian will use to put the new president and the political situation following the presidential election on a short leash.' Chen said 'nothing will really happen in the wake of the UN referendum.' Surely nothing will happen if what he referred to is that the island will become the 'Taiwan country' or that it can enter the UN following the UN referendum. But the passage of the UN referendum will provide Chen with a topic and a leverage to put the new president and Taiwan's political situation on a short leash. On the contrary, should the 'UN referendum' fail to pass, it will be akin to the Green camp casting a 'non-confidence' vote on Chen, so that he will no longer be able to put the DPP on a short leash. Who said that 'nothing will happen in the wake of the UN referendum?' ..."

H) "Prescience or Inordinate Fear?"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (12/15):

"It appears that the United States, Taiwan's only ally and supporter, is worried. Raymond Berghardt [sic], chairman of the American Institute in Taiwan, told the local press on Tuesday that his meeting with President Chen Shui-bian broached a number of issues, including Washington's concern about the 'peaceful transfer

of power' after the upcoming election. ... The question is certainly an affront to President Chen, who wraps himself in democracy. The fact that the AIT chairman briefed the local media on his meeting with Chen is a clear sign that Washington is unhappy about what Chen has been doing in his persistent push for Taiwan independence, in violation of his pledges to Washington and the international community. ...

"While Mr. Berghardt [sic] failed in his mission to dissuade Chen from holding the referendum, his trip to Taiwan marked a watershed in Washington's dealing with Chen and the ruling Democratic Progressive Party. President Chen may have become a hero for radical separatists for having the guts ('LP' should be a better word) to say 'No' to Washington, but he has lost credibility and trustworthiness with his staunchest ally. The fact that Mr. Berghardt [sic] did raise the issue of 'peaceful transfer of power' shows Washington's suspicion of Chen and its lack of trust in him. The lame duck president may not care about it at all, but the

American diplomat's concern about the election should not be dismissed by Taiwan's people.

Mr. Berghardt [sic] is by no means an alarmist. He knows Taiwan and knows what Chen and his party are capable of doing. Have you seen what the Central Election Commission is doing these days? They are trying to amend a 'postponement clause' to set conditions that would justify the postponement of elections, such as natural disasters or 'force majeure.' What they are up to? It seemed that Berghardt's worry is neither excessive nor inordinate. We should thank Mr. Berghardt for his prescient warning, just as Frank Hsieh, the DPP's presidential candidate, thanked the American friend for giving 'warmth' to him by urging him to be 'his own man,' not to be led by the nose by a demagogue."

YOUNG